

# THE YOUNGEST PARENTS

## Educators' Guide to the Exhibition



**A Traveling Exhibition of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University**

1317 West Pettigrew Street, Durham, North Carolina 27705 | 919-660-3663 | <http://cds.aas.duke.edu>

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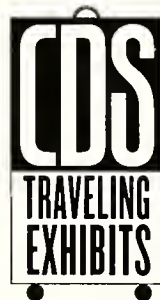
*Cover: Gorham, Maine, 1996. Photograph by Jocelyn Lee.*

*Above: Henderson, North Carolina, 1989. Photograph by John Moses.*

*Below: Orange County, North Carolina, 1989. Photograph by John Moses.*



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# Introduction

John Moses and Jocelyn Lee's portraits of teenage parents in their homes and yards show us capable and caring young mothers and fathers who are well supported by friends and family, as well as nervous new parents who seem unprepared for the life-altering responsibilities they face. What results from these intimate portraits, and the words that accompany them, is a document of the rich complexity of lived experience, avoiding easy stereotypes about class, race, and maturity.

Despite recent trends suggesting a reduction in the rates of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing, the United States continues to have one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the industrialized world. This exhibition provides an additional means for thinking about this important reality and fosters dialogue about family relationships, sex education, and the day-to-day difficulties of the youngest parents.

In communities across the country, Americans struggle with how best to educate young people about sex. Who should take responsibility for talking to teenagers about sex, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, parents or educators? Some fear that talking about sex with teenagers promotes sexual activity, while some fear the dangers that result

from a lack of information. Complicating these conversations is the fact that some sexually active teens want to become pregnant, despite the availability of birth control. A much smaller percentage of adolescent teens had no choice in the matter, because of rape or incest.

This exhibit presents the work of two photographers who sought to explore the lives of over forty adolescent parents and their children. John Moses, a professor of photography at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and a practicing pediatrician, spent eleven years documenting teenage parents in North Carolina counties. Jocelyn Lee, a photography professor at Princeton University, spent six years in parts of Texas, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Nova Scotia, living and working with young mothers. Friendships of support and caring developed between the photographers and the teens, and the trust resulting from these relationships deepens the character and meaning of their work.

On behalf of the Center for Documentary Studies, which organized and is traveling this exhibition, we hope that you and your students find these words and photographs powerful tools for grappling with this important issue.



*Sharon and Sophia, holding their babies, beside their grandmother, Vance County, North Carolina, 1986. Photograph by John Moses.*

# Artists' Statements:

## Jocelyn Lee & John Moses

I began photographing teen mothers in 1990. I was interested in exploring how these girls negotiated their way through adolescence, developing unique identities while adjusting to the strain of maternal responsibility. What I discovered over my five-odd years of photographing young families is that teenage pregnancy is a complicated phenomenon. It develops from many layers of influence and need, and there are no simple relationships between its causes and effects. Teenage pregnancy and parenthood are filled with contradictions: there is childlike optimism confronting adult responsibility; there is tremendous love joined with personal sacrifice; there is unrestrained anger and quiet acquiescence.

Naturally it is through the lens of my own life that I saw these girls and their families. I can never fully understand the experience of early motherhood, or attempt to document it in its entirety. At best my photographs can serve as particular frames through which to view young mothers and their families. And it is from the position of both admiration for each girl's love for her child, and hope for her own future, that I made these images. —JOCELYN LEE

*Jocelyn Lee is a professor at Princeton University, and worked for six years in parts of Texas, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Nova Scotia, living and working with young mothers.*

For almost twenty years, I have been working as a doctor and a photographer, based at Duke University. ¶ In 1986 I began photographing teenage parents in North Carolina as a way of better understanding their lives. Although I had seen many adolescents as a pediatrician, I sensed there was more to learn by meeting teens on their turf, where I hoped they would be more comfortable and more revealing of themselves.

I photographed twenty-five adolescents in Durham and surrounding rural counties, visiting most homes several times, often returning with photographs I had taken previously. At first I was concerned with how the teenagers would regard certain images, but invariably they regarded my photographs with intense interest.

Though I was primarily concerned with making photographs, my hosts frequently reminded me that I was a doctor. They often had questions and concerns about their children. Could I help? Before long I had tucked a prescription

pad in my camera bag. I was eager to help when I could, to offer a bit of advice as thanks for being welcomed.

These youngest parents taught me a lot, even as many of them struggled with serious challenges in their own lives. I became open to new ways of thinking about the issue of adolescent pregnancy and parenthood, which I believe made me a better doctor.

I've recently started visiting some of the teens I photographed years ago, now adults, and their children, teenagers themselves and of childbearing age. I hope to produce a new series of images that will contribute further to a better understanding of the ongoing issue of adolescent pregnancy.

—JOHN MOSES

*John Moses, a photography instructor at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and a practicing pediatrician, spent eleven years documenting teenage parents in North Carolina counties.*



**Above:** William, Sophia, and son, Vance County, North Carolina, 1988. Photograph by John Moses.

**Opposite:** Ruth and one of her triplets, Mebane, North Carolina, 1989. Photograph by John Moses.



# Adolescent Pregnancy in North Carolina & the Nation Fact Sheet

North Carolina has the ninth highest teen pregnancy rate in the United States.

The teen pregnancy rate in the United States is more than nine times higher than that of the Netherlands, nearly four times higher than the rate in France, and nearly five times higher than the rate in Germany.

Estimates are that at least half of all new HIV infections in the United States occur in people under the age of twenty-five.

Every day in North Carolina, thirty-nine teenagers become pregnant.

In 2003, a total of 17,833 North Carolinians between the ages of ten and nineteen became pregnant.

In North Carolina, 30% of the pregnancies of females nineteen years old and younger were repeat pregnancies.

Only one-third of teen mothers receive a high school diploma.

Among sexually active males ages fifteen to nineteen, 12% have made a partner pregnant.

Nineteen percent of pregnant teenagers have partners who are at least six years older than they are.

Males involved in teen childbearing are often not teenagers themselves: Adult men fathered over 50% of babies born to females fifteen to seventeen years old.

Adolescents who have recently had a baby may have a higher risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease in the year after giving birth.

Seventy-four percent of North Carolina high school seniors reported having sexual intercourse at least once.

Between 11% and 20% of teenagers become pregnant as a direct result of rape.

61% of pregnant teenagers have had an unwanted sexual experience.

One in three adolescents will contract a sexually transmitted infection by the age of twenty-four.

Every year, three million teenagers contract a sexually transmitted infection.



Pregnancy rates among sexually active females declined from 54.5% in 1994 to 33.6% in 1998.

The proportion of teenagers who talked with an adult about birth control, pregnancy, or sexually transmitted diseases increased from 61% in 1994 to 70% in 1998.

Overall, the percentage of sexually active high school students has stayed relatively unchanged over the past decade, ranging from 33% to 38%.

A survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation reveals that teenagers get information about sexually transmitted infections—especially HIV/AIDS information—from the following sources: schools and teachers, 59%; parents, 36%; news, 29%; and entertainment media, 26%.

**These facts and statistics were found on the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina Web site, as well as on links and resources listed on their site.**

**Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina**  
<http://www.appcnc.org/>

# Themes for Discussion

What are the circumstances that make teen pregnancy different from adult pregnancy?

What are some of the challenges a teenage mother might face? What are some of the challenges a teenage father might face? How are their roles different? What are the roles a parent plays in a child's life? What role does the community play in a child's life?

Imagine that you were going to be a teen parent. How do you think your community (family, peers, community groups) would react? How would you want people to react? Imagine being told that a family member or friend was going to be a teen parent. How would you respond?

Why do you think some teenagers want to have children? Why do most teenagers want to wait to have children? How would being a teen parent impact your life—your finances, health, social life, free time, education, and employment?

Close your eyes and form a picture in your mind of a teen parent. Who are they? What do they look like? What do their homes and surroundings look like? Do you feel that teen mothers and fathers are judged according to different standards than more mature parents? Are they judged differently across socio-economic, ethnic, and gender lines? Think about the prejudices you may have about teen parents. How does seeing this exhibit challenge or reinforce these ideas?

Have you seen images of teen parents on television or in magazines? Have you read about them in books? What were those depictions like? How are the images in this exhibit similar to or different from what you have seen or read about in the media?

Do you know a teen parent? How do the images in this exhibit relate to your own experiences?



**Left:** Henderson, North Carolina, 1990 (father of baby, right). Photograph by John Moses.

**Opposite, top:** Michele feeding Chasati, Orange County, North Carolina, 1988. Photograph by John Moses.

**Opposite, bottom:** Chasati and her mother, Michele, Orange County, North Carolina, 2004. Photograph by John Moses.



# Writing and Discussion Activity

## Gallery Walk

Try to give students at least ten minutes to walk through the gallery on their own, allowing time for their own interests to focus their attention.

## Discussion: Documentary Photography

*The background information on photography may be useful here.*

1. What are the different types of subjects presented in the exhibit (e.g., daily life, landscapes, social interaction)?
2. How do the photographs of these various subjects differ? How are they similar?

## Discussion or Free-writing: Reading Individual Photographs

*Ask each student to stand or sit in front of a favorite photograph in the exhibit and begin discussion with the following questions:*

1. What are some of the details in the picture?
2. What might be happening outside of the frame of the camera?
3. Why might the photographer have chosen to take the picture at this moment?
4. What can you gather about the relationships portrayed in the picture?
5. What do you notice about the following details?

**CAMERA ANGLE.** Where is the photographer pointing the camera?

**BACKGROUND.** What do you see behind the main subject of the photo?

**EXPRESSION.** If there are people in the photos, what do their faces and physical postures tell you about them?

**CONTRAST.** Where are the differences between light and dark areas of the photograph, and what kinds of shapes do they create?

**SHADOWS.** Where are there lines created by differences between light and dark areas?

**PATTERNS.** Are there patterns in the objects or patterns created by shadows or contrasting light and dark areas?

6. How do these details contribute to the overall feeling or meaning of the photograph?

7. What does the photograph communicate about its main subject (person, place, or thing)?

8. Does the photograph remind you of anybody or any place you know? Why, and how does that make you feel?

Discussing the photographs in this way allows students to begin to understand that the way in which a subject is photographed—and not just what is in the photograph—contributes to the feelings and messages that come from looking at the images. How a subject is photographed and the manner in which the photographer decides to portray the subject ultimately convey a message.



# The Documentary Arts

## Photography and Oral History



**Above:** Cedar Park, Texas, 1992. Photograph by Jocelyn Lee.

**Opposite:** Austin, Texas, 1993. Photograph by Jocelyn Lee.

### Documentary Intentions in Photography

#### Setting the Scene

Documentary photographs are considered to be visual records of events, people, places, and other subjects. Because of the camera's ability to inscribe a visual image of the world before its lens, photography has experienced an ever-evolving relationship with "reality" and its documentation. While the term documentary suggests authenticity and objectivity, photography in this vein is actually a far more complex and subjective medium. A photographer assesses, frames, and presents subjects in a series of choices and controls that reveal his or her personal perspective and artistic intentions. In addition, when photographs are commissioned, the work may also reflect aspects of the sponsoring party's point of view.

#### Historical Applications

Since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, photography's use as a visual document has had many applications. In

1855, the Crimean War became the first armed conflict to be photographed. European travel photographers of that time, such as John Thomson and Francis Frith, recorded places exotic to them and their audience, including China and Egypt. In the 1860s in America, Mathew Brady and Timothy O'Sullivan photographed Civil War soldiers, battlefields, and casualties. From 1865 to 1885, the United States government and the railroad companies sponsored expeditions that explored and documented the new frontiers of the American West; such photographers as Timothy O'Sullivan and William Henry Jackson were included. In the 1870s, Eadweard Muybridge studied motion through a series of timed photographs depicting men vaulting over poles and horses galloping on a track.

At the turn of the century, many photographers became interested in recording customs, manners, and society. Some, such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, awakened Americans to the need for social reform in urban slums by showing the deplorable working and living conditions of immigrants and child laborers. These social documentary images fueled the passage of laws that improved the quality of life for the working poor.

In 1931, Harold Edgerton invented a repeatable electronic flash system capable of capturing stop-action images, evolving Muybridge's work and merging photography with science. Later that decade the era of picture magazines emerged with the beginning of *Life* magazine in 1936, which commissioned photo-essays on many human-interest topics. From 1935 to 1942, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture, hired numerous photographers, including Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, to record the American experience and the effects of the economic devastation of the Great Depression.

By World War II, the modern print media developed photojournalism as a genre and profession. This term refers to photographs that communicate news and current events in newspapers and magazines.

In 1955, Edward Steichen organized *The Family of Man* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This project expressed an ideology of universal experience through images of life in over sixty-eight countries. It was one of the most popular photography exhibitions and books ever presented.

Succeeding generations of photographers independently explored and presented fine art documentary subjects, and often published their work in magazines and books. In 1956, Robert Frank's photographs in *The Americans* signaled a new documentary approach that affirmed the subjectivity of the



photographer. Frank's unglamorous photographs of America presented common, unheroic subjects interpreted through unusual vantage points, jarring light, and differing degrees of focus. These images were thought of as unpatriotic and were not received positively or popularly in America, but they introduced a new, modern approach to depicting the world, which was ultimately extremely influential in photography. Later, in 1967, an important exhibition titled *New Documents* featured the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, whose photographs of the social landscape of the time also broke with established rules of subject, composition, and technique.

In 1968, the first photographs of Earth from the moon were produced, followed by images of Neil Armstrong's historic walk on the moon in 1969. Also in 1969, Richard Nixon's press secretary Ron Ziegler coined the term "photo opportunity"—describing situations that would show the President at his best. In 1976, space photography took another giant leap when Viking I relayed the first color images

of another planet—Mars—with photography turning science fiction and scientific speculation into fact.

During the last twenty-five years, artists have continued to create photographs with documentary intentions that examine aspects of cultural expression, history, war, politics, landscape, science, and society. Many have also explored subjects such as identity, family, and relationships.

## Color

Color processes in photography extend back to the early years of the twentieth century, but were somewhat ignored by documentarians because color had been closely associated with commercial rather than artistic practices. The use of color in documentary work did not come into wide practice until the 1960s, when commercial color film processes were perfected. Photographers who began to incorporate color did so for numerous reasons, including the expressive element it lent to their work. Today, color photography is readily







**Above:** *Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, 1995.* Photograph by Jocelyn Lee.

**Opposite:** *Theresa and her daughter, Henderson, North Carolina, 1986.* Photograph by John Moses.

accepted and widely used in all forms of photographic expression, including newspapers.

## Oral History Traditions

### Worldwide Applications

For centuries, civilizations and communities across the globe have used talking, singing, and speechmaking to pass down knowledge, history, genealogy, spiritual practices, customs, and lore from one generation to the next. Even though written languages have existed since the time of the Egyptians, most cultures have long traditions of using oral

methods to preserve their history and way of life. Some cultural communities whose spoken languages have no written counterpart continue to rely solely on this “word of mouth” tradition to keep their history, religious rituals, legal practices, agricultural techniques, and recipes alive. From the folk tales of the Philippines to the songs and dances of the American Indians, from the great Finnish Kalevala epics to the stories of resistance and struggle in South Africa, oral traditions enhance and animate our understanding of history and people around the world.

Oral traditions have survived and flourished because of careful listening, thoughtful memorization, and more re-



cently due to the efforts of others to record them—be it with pencil and paper or through the use of a recording device. By making efforts to record “oral histories,” we are working to document our experience and the experience of others. This idea has roots as ancient as cave paintings and Egyptian cuneiform.

## In the United States

The colonists who conquered North America and formed the United States brought with them a keen interest in oral histories. Each colony had its own historian who documented accounts of the settlement experience by talking with settlers and reading diaries, ships’ logs, and personal memoirs. Later, the use of “oral evidence” was less valued by historians who preferred to concentrate their studies on written sources, such as letters, journals, and newspapers.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, there was a resurgence of interest in oral histories. Many historians, anthropologists, ethnologists, and folklorists were concerned that advances in technology would devastate many traditional cultures. They also recognized that political and social changes such as the end of slavery and massive immigration were important historical occurrences that needed to be documented. In the late 1800s, many anthropologists and ethnologists obtained government support to interview, photograph, and record the indigenous languages and traditions of American Indian communities across the country on primitive wax cylinder and wire recording devices. After the invention of the reel-to-reel tape recorder, folklorists from the Library of Congress traveled to towns and cities across the South collecting stories, songs, riddles, and recipes from both Anglo and African American citizens. During the 1930s and 1940s, unemployed writers, journalists, and playwrights were hired by the Works Progress Administration to interview thousands of former slaves and recent immigrants to the United States. In 1947, Allan Nevins founded the Columbia University Oral History Research Office, the first department at an American university devoted to teaching and practicing the methods of oral history. Since then, the study of oral histories has expanded. Universities, libraries, government agencies, local historical societies, community organizations, families, and private institutions all over the world use the techniques of oral history to collect valuable information about the facts of everyday life.

## Characteristics and Educational Applications

As an educational tool, first-person narratives reveal cultural knowledge through personal experiences, perspectives, memories, vocabulary, and dialect. Many of these narratives be-

come performances through the speaker’s use of inflection, gestures, and verbal and facial expressions. Many cultures have emphasized the performative aspects of recitations, storytelling, and oratory by including instruments, dance, masks, and other theatrical embellishments.

Because of the immediacy and intimacy of first-person narratives, they often carry strong emotional appeal for listeners. For example, a personal interview by a woman attending an actual childbirth in support of a mother can make a much more significant impression on its listeners than a factual, objective documentary report on increased use of midwives in hospitals. This characteristic adds to the viable and effective use of first-person narratives as learning tools.

Educational resources such as classroom textbooks and newspapers have been criticized for focusing on dominant influences or populations in the world. First-person narratives from a cross-section of people who make up a society or take part in an event can provide essential elements to understanding. When interviewers solicit and collect many differing accounts of a particular subject, they give voice to people often overlooked or ignored and, thus, produce rich and diverse points of view.

This essay on photography and oral history—by Cass Fey, curator of education at the Center for Creative Photography—is an excerpt from the Educators’ Guide prepared for the national documentary project *Indivisible: Stories of American Community*. The entire guide (©2000 Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents) can be downloaded from the web at [www.indivisible.org/resources.htm](http://www.indivisible.org/resources.htm).

*Indivisible*, a project of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University in partnership with the Center for Creative Photography at The University of Arizona, was funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.



# Resources

## In Print

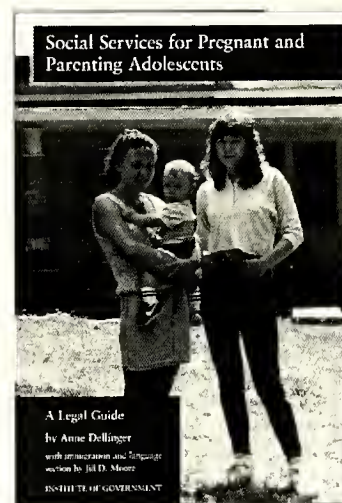
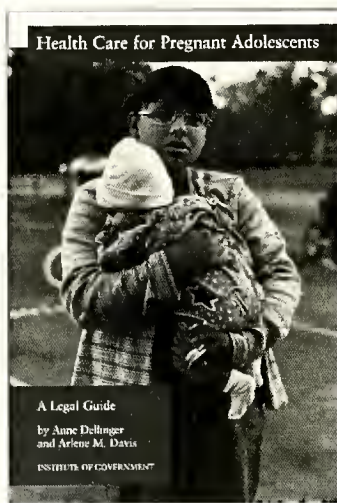
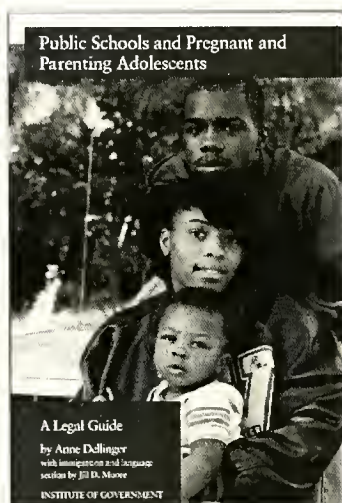
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- Dellinger, Anne. *Social Services for Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents: A Legal Guide*, 2001. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Institute of Government.
- Maynard, Rebecca A. *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, 1996. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.

## On the Web

- Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina  
<http://www.appcnc.org/>
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy  
<http://www.teenpregnancy.org/>
- National Teen Pregnancy and Birth Data  
<http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/national.asp>
- Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention  
<http://www.ctr.org/recapp/>
- University of North Carolina Adolescent Pregnancy Project  
<http://www.adolescentpregnancy.unc.edu/>
- Planned Parenthood  
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/>
- The Center for Reproductive Rights  
<http://www.reproductiverights.org/>
- Teen Outreach Reproductive Challenge (TORCH)  
<http://www.prochoiceny.org/so4torch/>
- [teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://teachingsexualhealth.ca)  
<http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/Films>

## Film

*The Education of Shelby Knox: Sex, Lies, and Education*  
Email: [marion@incite-pictures.com](mailto:marion@incite-pictures.com)





# Credits



**Top:** *Dominique, Henderson, North Carolina, 1986.* Photograph by John Moses.

**Middle:** *Brenda and Bradley, Orange County, North Carolina, 1989.* Photograph by John Moses.

**Bottom:** *Tony holding two of his triplets, Mebane, North Carolina, 1988.* Photograph by John Moses.

Iris Tillman Hill, Chris Sims, Courtney Reid-Eaton, John Moses, Liz Lindsey, curators of *The Youngest Parents* exhibition

Liz Lindsey and Jimmy Richardson, editors

John Moses, adviser

Bonnie Campbell, graphic designer

Alexa Dilworth and Lynn McKnight, editorial assistance

## Center for Documentary Studies Traveling Exhibitions

This exhibition was organized by the Center for Documentary Studies, with initial support from the Lyndhurst Foundation, the Elizabeth Firestone-Graham Foundation, and the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation.

This traveling exhibitions project was funded by the North Carolina Humanities Council, a state-based program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The findings and conclusions presented by this project do not necessarily represent the views of the North Carolina Humanities Council nor of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The North Carolina Humanities Council is a non-profit foundation and the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Its primary mission is to work with North Carolina communities to broaden the meaning of public education for the public good. The Council's free, public humanities programs provide ongoing educational forums for all North Carolinians which address questions of identity, community, and citizenship. The North Carolina Humanities Council is made up of volunteer citizens who meet three times a year to review proposals submitted by non-profit community organizations and institutions.

This project was supported by the North Carolina Arts Council, with funding from the State of North Carolina and the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.

The mission of the North Carolina Arts Council, which celebrates those who create and enjoy art in all 100 counties, is to enrich the cultural life of the state. It nurtures and supports excellence in the arts, and provides opportunities for every North Carolinian to experience the arts. A division of the Department of Cultural Resources, the Arts Council further serves as a catalyst for the development of arts organizations and facilities throughout the state as it makes grants and offers technical assistance.



